ISSN 0712-7774

$2.25USA • $2.75CANADA • £1.25UK

203
FEB

NOTE

You know, every time that I complete one of these extensive documents having to do with the comic-book industry (in this case the "Dear Friends of Lulu" open letter which appears immediately after this issue's story), I delude myself that I have finally covered every angle and aspect of the non-creative comics world it is possible to cover. I have expressed my opinion on every imaginable subject having nothing to do with writing and drawing, have left no stone unturned in stating my case for the "record" (whatever that proves to be in later years, if anything). The inescapable conclusion is drawn that there is a conspiracy abroad in the land to continuously engage my attentions outside the realm of my genuine interests. Even as recognition of the irrefutable and central fact of this condition is achieved, grasped, and held, the mind reels with implication. How wide a net has been cast! How many otherwise disconnected and "normal" (by all appearances) individuals have been swept up in the perfidious task of distracting me from writing and drawing *Cerebus*! The communications network alone is of such intricacy, all hidden from observation, that one begins to boggle at the resources required! Only a handful of individuals in the comic-book field are possessed of sufficient cash-on-hand to institute so wide-ranging a program. So few are they in number that their names are as familiar to us as . . .

Just kidding.

Part of it is an addiction. I've noticed a number of people in the field are "hooked" on the high of crisis management. Deriving their greatest pleasure from the sequential uncertainties which characterized each successive month of 1995, many of them continue to nurture the atmosphere of uncertainty, going so far as to create an aura of calamity where none exists. I don't think I'm like that.

I mean, I *really* don't think I'm like that. For one reason or another I have gotten a reputation as someone to pay attention to in the comic-book field. The combination of longevity on *Cerebus* and accurate forecasting of the last few convulsions which the market has perpetrated upon itself lends my opinions a certain cachet (Drew Hayes tells a funny story about a comics professional discussing one of '95's Crises du Jour with him and asking, "Not that I care, but have you talked to Sim about it?").

In many ways we're *all* to blame. One can understand the paper-shufflers, the hangers-on, the fart-catchers, and the bureaucrats keeping the Crisis Game at a fever pitch — after all, the more crises, the more jobs in the bureaucracy for those pretending to have the solution. But, as self-publishers, it's time to recognize that whatever the crisis or perception of crisis, our best offense — and our best defense — is to get the next page done, to get the next book out.

In the protracted war that the direct market has become, productivity and reliability are our best — in fact, our *only* — weapons. All the rest is just words.

So no more words — here's issue 203.

CEREBUS

NO. 203 FEBRUARY 1996

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GUYS
a novel
•
(Cerebus 201 to Cerebus 219)

MONTHLY

ALL CONTENTS
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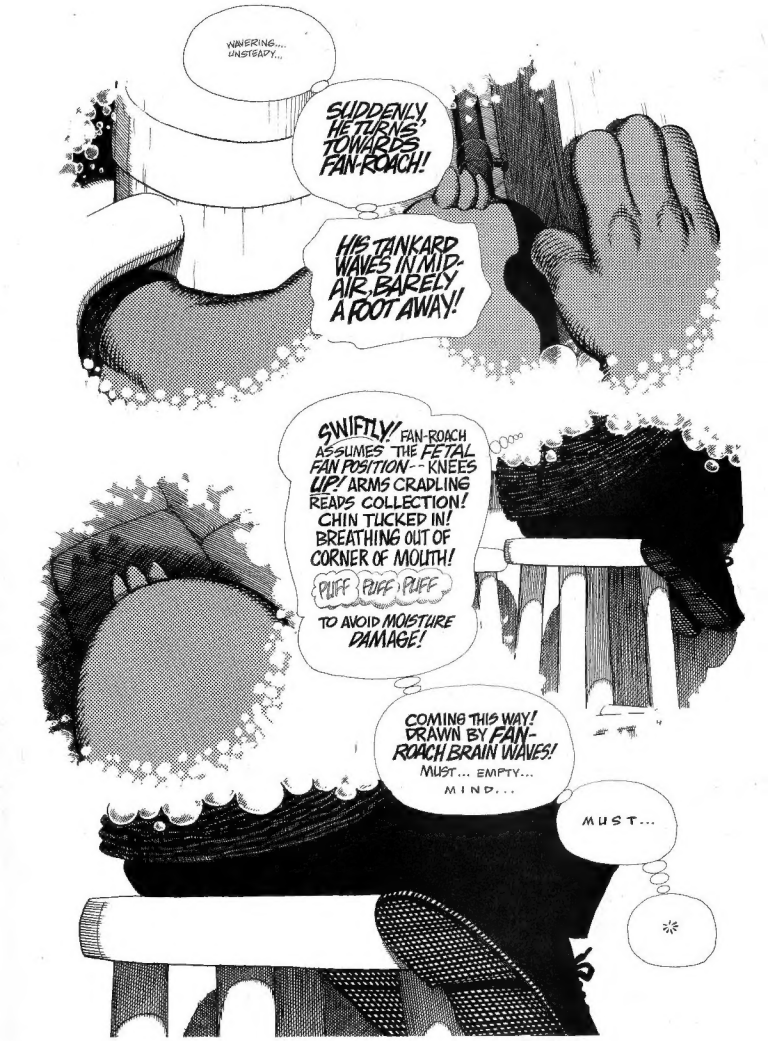
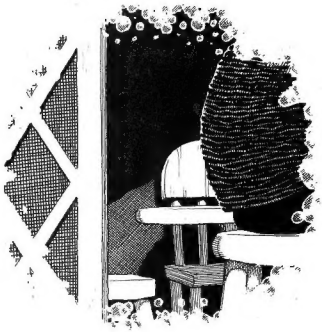
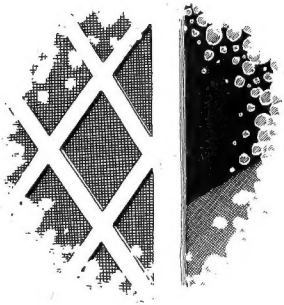
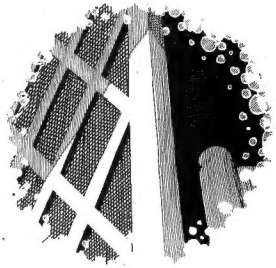
PRINTED IN CANADA
by PRENEY PRINT & LITHO, WINDSOR, ONTARIO

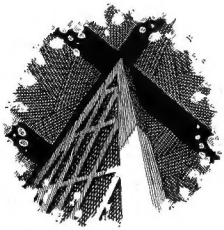
FAN-ROACH CLUTCHES HIS COMPLETE SET OF 'PLUTO AND SQUINTEYE' READS...
KEEPING A WATCHFUL EYE ON THE... SHIFTY-LOOKING FELLOW..... SITTING NEXT TO HIM
SEEMINGLY READING HIS VERY THOUGHTS! (WAS SUCH A THING POSSIBLE?)
FAN-ROACH FELT THAT IT WAS...
YES! FAN-ROACH HAD CAUGHT HIM AT IT -- NOW THE LITTLE GRAY FELLOW WHO LOOKED SO FAMILIAR -- WHAT WAS HIS NAME? -- WAS PRETENDING TO STARE AT THE DISPLAY OF BOTTLES...
HE INTENDED TO STEAL FAN-ROACH'S COLLECTION -- FAN-ROACH WAS SURE...
NOT FOR THE FIRST TIME, FAN-ROACH WONDERED WHY THEY HELD THESE SIGNINGS IN TAVERNS WHERE ANY OLD DRUNK, LACKING AWARENESS OF THE IMPORTANCE OF KEEPING READS IN MINT CONDITION, MIGHT ACCIDENTALLY -- OR ON PURPOSE --
UT! CAREFUL, FAN-ROACH! THE THOUGHT IS FATHER TO THE DEED FOR EVEN NOW HE REACHES FOR HIS TANKARD! ONE FLICK OF HIS WRIST AND FAN-ROACH'S MINT COPY OF 'PLUTO AND SQUINTEYE' NUMBER FIVE WOULD BE -- WOULD BE -...
CHOKE


WAVERING... UNSTEADY...
SUDDENLY, HE TURNS TOWARDS FAN-ROACH!
HIS TANKARD WAVES IN MID-AIR, BARELY A FOOT AWAY!
SWIFTLY! FAN-ROACH ASSUMES THE FETAL FAN POSITION -- KNEES UP! ARMS CRADLING READS COLLECTION! CHIN TUCKED IN! BREATHING OUT OF CORNER OF MOUTH!
PUFF PUFF PUFF
TO AVOID MOISTURE DAMAGE!
COMING THIS WAY! DRAWN BY FAN-ROACH BRAIN WAVES!
MUST... EMPTY... MIND...
MUST...





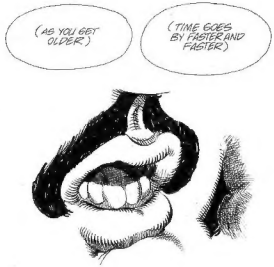




THUMP

MUST HAVE SNOWED LAST NIGHT ...
OR..
YES! JUNO AGAIN
YOU CAN TELL BY THE RED ICE...
THAT'S WHY CEREBUS COULDN'T FIND THE DOOR ...
...IT HAS TO CATCH THE LIGHT A CERTAIN WAY.
UNH!
NOW WHAT?
YEST IS CAUGHT.... AGAIN!
THOSE SPIKES ARE ONLY VISIBLE FROM THE OTHER SIDE...

THE JUDGE IS VISITING FROM THE MOON. HE'S ABOUT TO TELL ELROD THE MEANING OF LIFE!

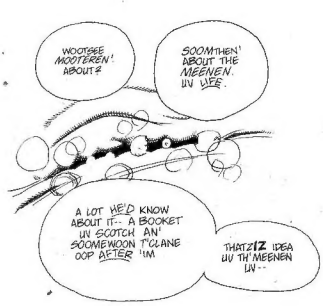

(AS YOU GET OLDER)
(TIME GOES BY FASTER AND FASTER)

SPRINGTIME ON JUNO ...

HEATWAVE!

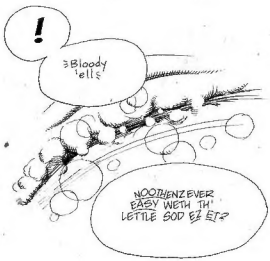
SNOWING AGAIN...

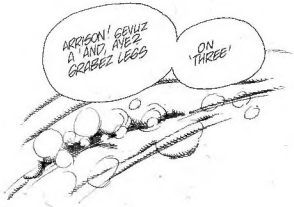
ELROD IS ACTUALLY DEATH!
SO OBVIOUS! HOW COULD CERBERUS

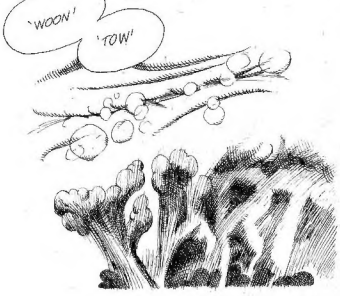

WOOTSEE MOOTEREN' ABOUT?
SOOMTHEN' ABOUT THE MEENEN. UV LIEE.
A LOT HE'D KNOW ABOUT IT-- A BOOKET UV SCOTCH AN' SOOMEWOON T'CLANE OOP AFTER 'IM
THATZ IZ IDEA UV TH' MEENEN UV--

'ALLO!
THAT SLIMY-LOOKEN RAD THENG ...PEEREN' OOP AT US...
BEAREN' AN OONCANNY RESAMBLENCE TO 'IZ EYE

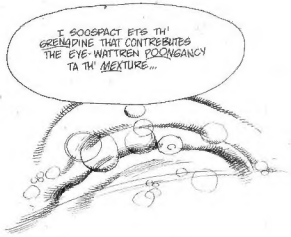
YOU'AVE T'GATOOP, MATE!
Y'LYIN' DOWN RIGHT WAY THE AUTYGRAPH LINEZ GOWINTA --

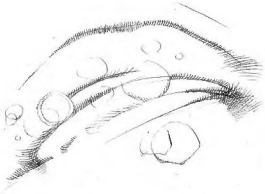

!
Bloody 'ell!
WOOTLENZ EVER EASY WETH TH' LETTLE SOD'EZ ET?

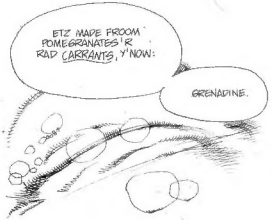

ARRISON! GEVUZ A 'AND, AVE'A GRABEZ LEGS
ON 'THREE'

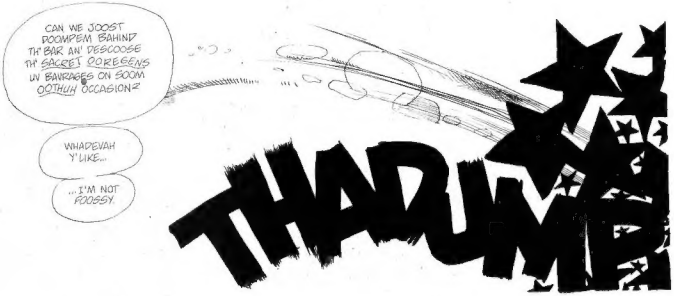

'WOON'
'TOW'

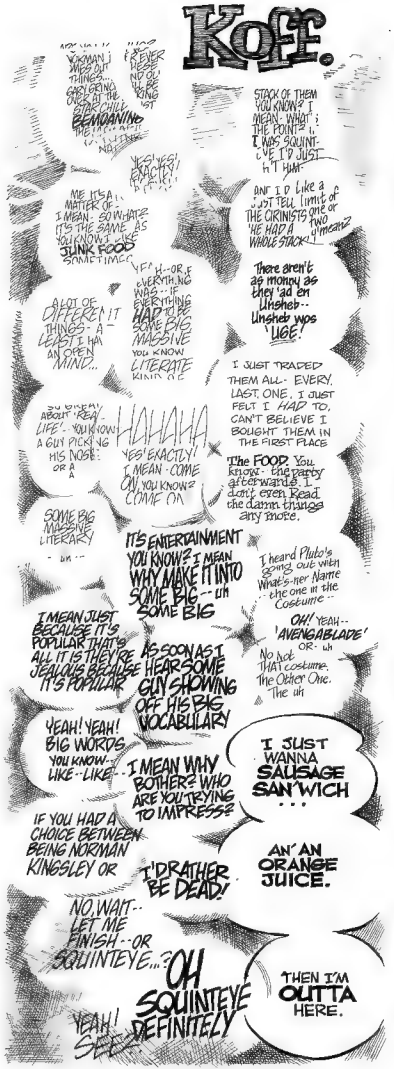
OW FUG!
EF 'EEZ SHET EMSALF AGAIN I'LL NOT BE THE ...
WEEREN LOOCK... ETS MERELY TH' GASEOUS BY-PRODUCT IN CONFIOUS AMOUNTS LV GEN, SCOTCH AN' GRENADINE...

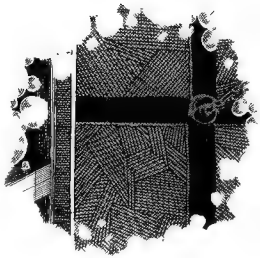

I SOOSPACT ETS TH' GRENADINE THAT CONTRIBUTES THE EYE-WATTREN POONGANCY TA TH' MEXTURE...

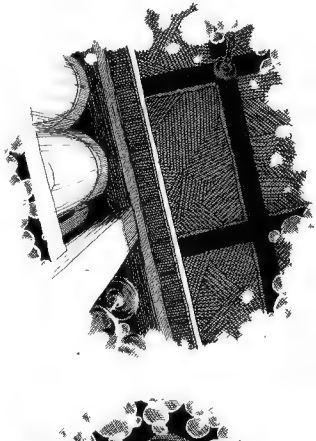


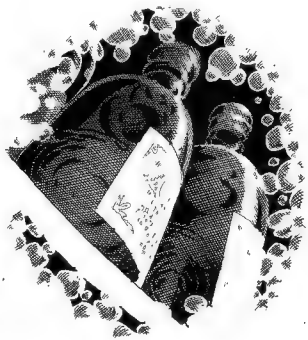

ETZ MADE FROOM POMEGRANATES 'R RAD CARRANTS, Y'NOW:
GRENADINE.


CAN WE JOOST POOMPEM BAHIND TH' BAR AN' PERCOOSE TH' SACRES OORBEENS LV BANRAGES ON SOOM OOTHUH OCCASION?
WHADEVAH Y'LIKE...
...I'M NOT FOOSSY.
THARUMP


Koff.
YEAH, MAN, I WIPED OUT THINGS... GRAV GRING OVER IN THE CORNER WILL BEMOANING
I NEVER HEARD OF NO OLIVE KING
STACK OF THEM YOU KNOW? I MEAN- WHAT'S THE POINT? I WAS SQUINT-IVE, I'D JUST H'T HIM-
YES! YES! EXACTLY! EXACTLY!
ME IT'S A MATTER OF I MEAN- SO WHITE IT'S THE SAME AS YOU KNOW, JUNK FOOD SAME IMAGE
AN' I'D like a JUST TELL limit of THE GRINGOS one or HE HAD A two WHOLE STACK!
There aren't as money as they 'ad en Unshed-- Unshed was USE!
H--OR IF EVERYTHING WAS-- IF EVERYTHING HAD TO BE SOME BIG MASSIVE YOU KNOW LITERATE
A LOT OF DIFFERENT IT THINGS- A- LEAST I HA AN OPEN MIND..
I JUST TRADED THEM ALL- EVERY LAST ONE. I JUST FELT I HAD TO, CAN'T BELIEVE I BOUGHT THEM IN THE FIRST PLACE
The FOOD You know- the party arrangements I don't even Read the damn things any more.
ABOUT REAL LIFE- YOU KNOW! A GUY PICKING HIS NOSE OR A
HAHAHA YES! EXACTLY! I MEAN- COME ON, YOU KNOW! COME ON
SOME BIG MASSIVE LITERARY
IT'S ENTERTAINMENT YOU KNOW? I MEAN WHY MAKE IT INTO SOME BIG-- UH SOME BIG
I heard Pluto's going out with Whats-her Name -- the one in the Costume --
OH! YEAH-- 'AVENGABLADE' OR- UH
I MEAN JUST BECAUSE IT'S POPULAR THAT'S ALL IT IS THEY'RE JEALOUS BECAUSE IT'S POPULAR
AS SOON AS I HEAR SOME GUY SHOWING OFF HIS BIG VOCABULARY
No, not THAT costume, the Otter One. The uh
YEAH! YEAH! BIG WORDS, YOU KNOW-- LIKE-- LIKE--
I MEAN WHY BOTHER? WHO ARE YOU TRYING TO IMPRESS?
I JUST WANNA SAUSAGE SAN'WICH . . .
IF YOU HAD A CHOICE BETWEEN BEING NORMAN KINGSLEY OR
I'D RATHER BE DEAD!
AN' AN ORANGE JUICE.
NO, WAIT-- LET ME FINISH-- OR SQUINTEYE...?
OH SQUINTEYE DEFINITELY
YEAH! SEE...
THEN I'M OUTTA HERE.

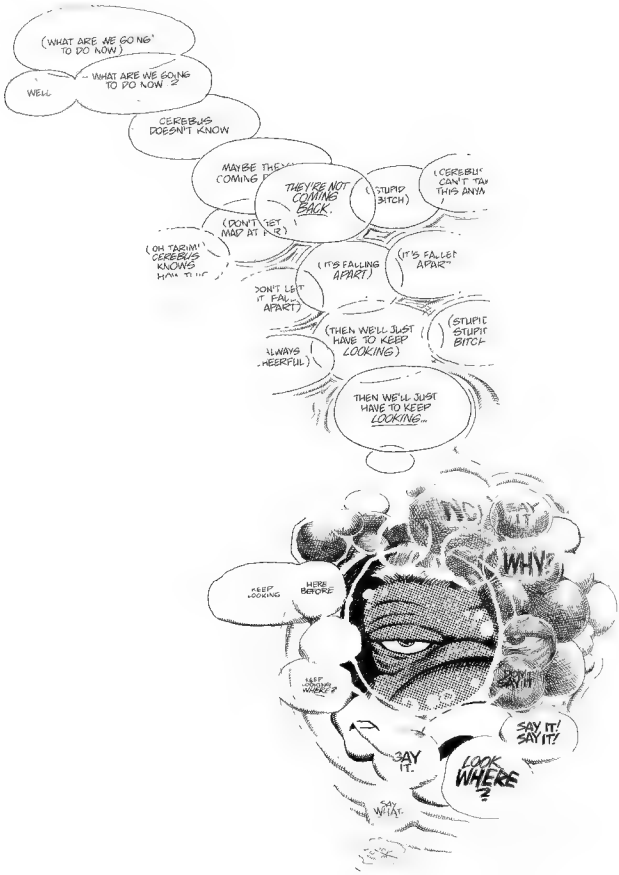


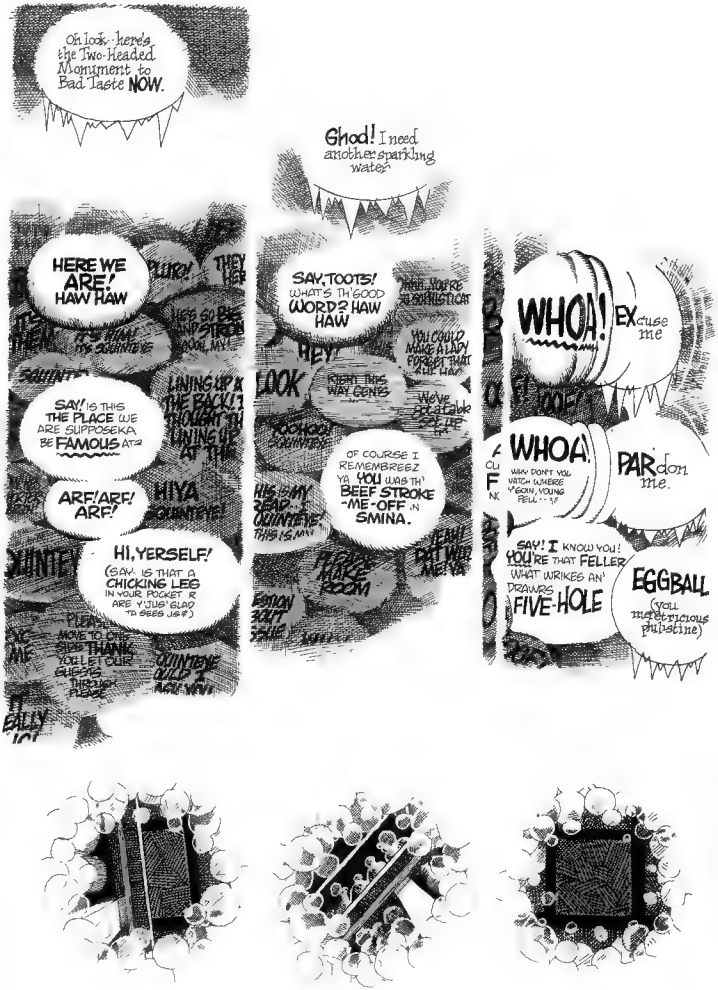




Well-your stuff is wonderful--and My stuff is wonderful...
But who else is there?
(sparkling water please)
I mean if there was a sudden influx of YOU's and ME's we might have something ...but what are the odds of THAT happening?
okay- maybe someone could compete with the stuff you're doing NOW ...but they could never TOUCH what you were doing five years ago...
I NEVER BELIEVED IN PLUTO ANYWAY.
(thanks)
Like artie said, 'I need some Company on the shelves' .something WORTHY of being next to MY work something with MY exalted level of..
They should've been here by now
UNTIL THERE IS MEASURE OF ACK THAT THE READS ACK FUR-SHES/ ERS ABOVE EV- STAND HERE AND BREATH UNTIL I BLUE

IN THE CENTER OF THE ROOM
THERE'S SOMETHING THERE
AYE
ONE CHAIR
ONE EMPTY CHAIR
WHAT?
(SHE NEVER HEARS CEREBUS WHEN HE SAYS THAT.)
ONE EMPTY CHAIR.
OH
WE'VE BEEN HERE BEFORE
(SHE HEARS CEREBUS WRONG)
WELL OF COURSE YOU HAVE THIS ...
(NO. NOT JUST CEREBUS. BOTH OF US)
(WE ALWAYS HAVE THIS CONVERSATION)
(WE'VE BEEN HERE BEFORE)
(IT'S ALWAYS FALLING APART)
(THEY'RE NOT HERE)
THEY'RE NOT HERE.
(WELL)

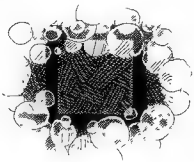

(WHAT ARE WE GOING TO DO NOW)
WELL
WHAT ARE WE GOING TO DO NOW?
CEREBUS DOESN'T KNOW
MAYBE THEY'RE COMING
THEY'RE NOT COMING BACK...
(STUPID BITCH)
(CEREBUS CAN'T TAKE THIS ANYMORE)
(DON'T GET MAD AT HER)
(OH JARIM! CEREBUS KNOWS HOW TO
(IT'S FALLING APART)
(IT'S FALLEN APART)
DON'T LET IT FALL APART)
(THEN WE'LL JUST HAVE TO KEEP LOOKING)
(STUPID STUPID BITCH)
ALWAYS CHEERFUL)
THEN WE'LL JUST HAVE TO KEEP LOOKING...
SAY IT
WHY?
KEEP LOOKING
HERE BEFORE
KEEP LOOKING WHERE?
SAY IT!
SAY IT!
SAY IT.
LOOK WHERE?
SAY WHAT

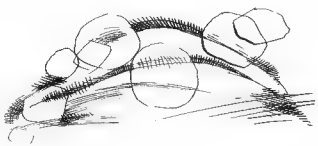

Oh look--here's the Two-Headed Monument to Bad Taste NOW.
Ghod! I need another sparkling water
HERE WE ARE! HAW HAW
SAY! IS THIS THE PLACE WE ARE SUPPOSEKA BE FAMOUS AT?
ARF! ARF! ARF!
HI, YERSELF! (SAY. IS THAT A CHICKING LEG IN YOUR POCKET R ARE Y JUS' GLAD TO SEES US?)
SAY, TOOTS! WHAT'S TH GOOD WORD? HAW HAW
LOOK
HEY!
OF COURSE I REMEMBREEZ YA YOU WAS TH' BEEF STROKE -ME-OFF IN SMINA.
WHOA! EXcuse me
WHOA
PARdon me.
SAY! I KNOW YOU! YOU'RE THAT FELLER WHAT JURIKES AN' DRAWERS FIVE-HOLE
EGGBALL (you meretricious pulsetine)

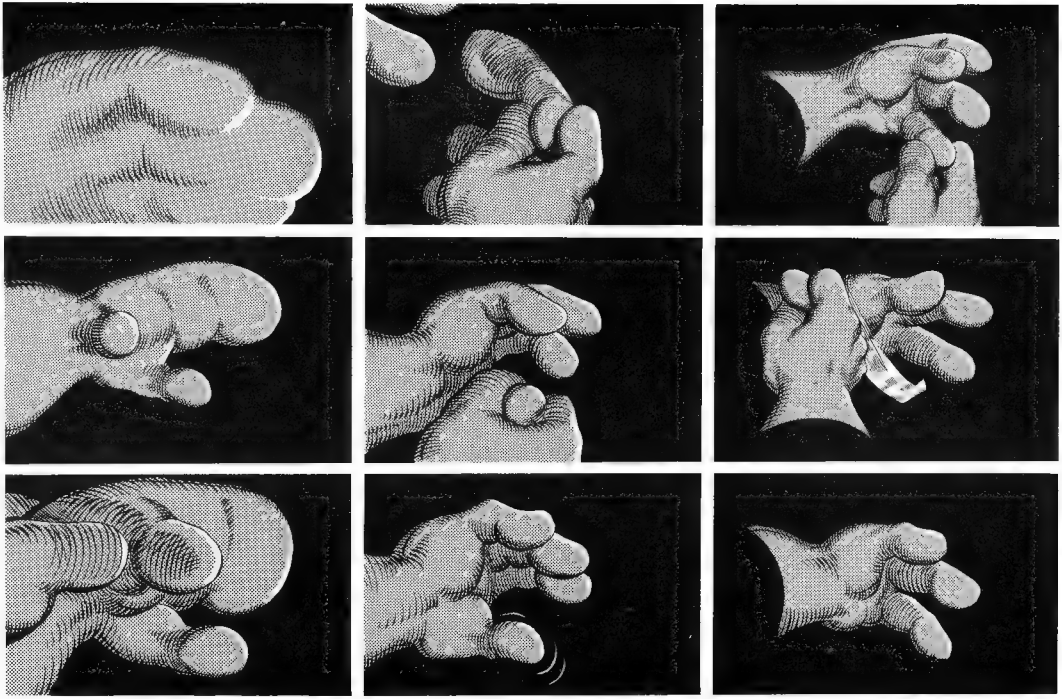
I JUST WANTED TO ASK!
SAY! WHAT'S TH' BIG IDEA O' BUMPIN' INTA ME?
I'M AFRAID WE HAVEN'T TIME FOR THIS
OOF
WHOA
WHOA!
WHO ARE YOU CALLIN' A MERRY-TRISHNESS PHILLY-STEEN?
Let go of my SHIRT!
RIP!
oof

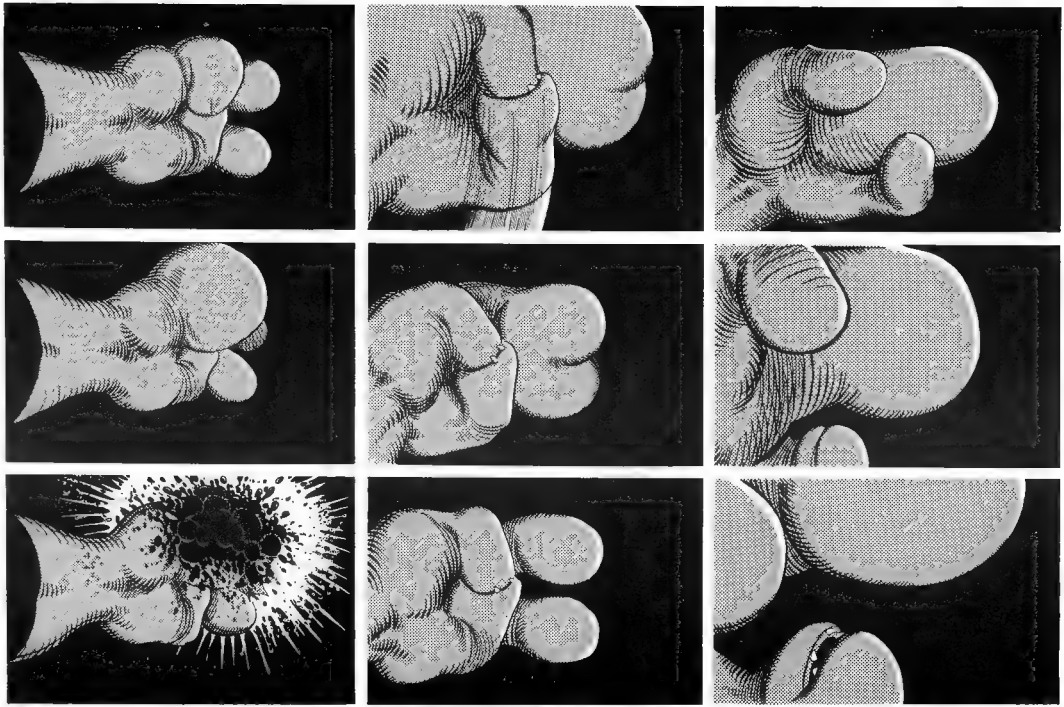
IF I FINDS OUT THAT 'MERRY TRISHNESS' AN' 'PHILLY STEEN' IS INSULKS
I'LL COME BACK THERE AN' POUN' YA

SOB
My favourite shirt.

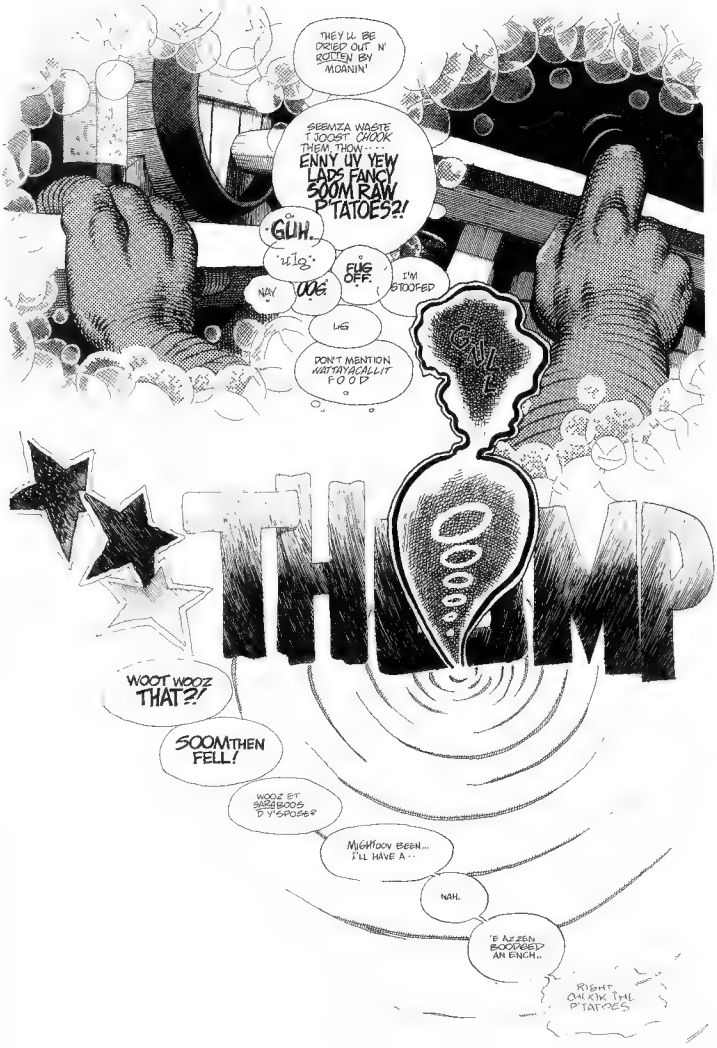








WHERE IZZY ANYWAY?
RIGHT WHERE WE LAFT IM- B'HIND THE BAH
SO'E EZ
SHOOD WE MOVE IM, THAN?
NAH-- EF 'E AZZEN' PUKED'R SHET 'EMSELS Y'DON'T WANT TA BE DESLODGEING SOOMTHENG AT THESS POINT
NOT MOOCH LAFT OON TH' PLABT, AVE'S JOOST A FEW RAW P'TATOES COOT OOP ENTA BITE SIZED CHOONKS
SHOOD WE STECK 'EM EN TH' LAHPEN THEN?
RAW P'TATOES? GET PLAUSIBLE SON..
OZ GONNA BAT RAW P'TATOES?
WELL - NOT RAW - BOOT SOOM WOON COULD COOK THAM OOP..
WELL THEY BETTA DO IT SOON
EN THESS 'EAT?


THEY'LL BE DRIED OUT N' ROTTEN BY MOANIN'
SEEN'ZA WASTE I JOOST CHOOK THEM THOM···
ENNY UV YEW LADS FANCY SOOM RAW P'TATOES?!
GUH.
NAY
OOG
FUG OFF.
I'M STOOFED
UG
DON'T MENTION WATTAYACALLIT FOOD
THUMP
WOOT WOOZ THAT?!
SOOMTHEN FELL!
WOOZ ET SIDDABOOS D'Y'SPOSE?
MIGHTOOV BEEN... I'LL HAVE A··
NAH.
'E AZZEN BOOGIES? AN ENCH..
RIGHT. QUICKIK THE P'TATOES

PLEASE
PLEASE KILL
CERBERUS JUST
WANTS TO DIE

petition

DEAR FRIENDS OF LULU

As most of you are aware, I'm not much of a one for organisations. In my experience, the collectivizing impulse is an ongoing misapprehension in human existence. When Heidi MacDonald was pitching the Friends of Lulu to a female comics professional with whom I was *(ahem)* keeping company in the summer of '93, I adopted a "devil's advocate" posture regarding membership for male comics professionals, teasing Heidi about the sorry moral position FoL would be adopting if the organisation were to adopt a prejudicial and exclusionary foundation in the interests of combatting prejudice and exclusion.

I noted with some interest that the issue itself caused the first major schism within Lulu Ranks — certain members threatening to quit if men were allowed to join, other members threatening to quit if men weren't allowed to join. Since the progress and resolution of the debate were in no way publicized (even to the extent that I am unaware of which faction I am addressing and which faction Lulu has been . . . "cleansed of"?), much of this letter will be carefully phrased to emphasize freedom of expression and belief. I am not unmindful of the fact that such phrasing is apt to fall wide of my intended target. Perhaps the best that can be said is that further schisms will result and that, at the end of the day, some Spawn of Lulu will be discharged from the present body politic of the organisation and that such a faction might see a reasonable and meritorious foundation in what I propose.

To judge by your bookmark (which seems to be the closest thing to a public declaration or manifesto yet generated by the Friends of Lulu), your organisation exists primarily to function as a support group for female comics professionals, a vehicle for encouraging greater female participation in the comic-book field, and a means of encouraging more women to buy comic books. To judge by your reading list of "approved for women" comic books, it seems certain that issue 186 of *Cerebus* has eliminated my standing as an "approved for women" comics creator and *Cerebus* as an "approved for women" comic-book title. Since I possessed such credentials at the time of . . . say . . . *Jaka's Story* (and still do with those women who are less, shall we say, ideologically pure than the Friends of Lulu), I think it safe to say that this communication is apt to fall upon deaf ears. Revisionism and ideological purity, fallen into disrepute with Karl Marx's grand societal experiment, seem to have retained a tenacious handhold among feminists. In fact, the largest question about the Friends of Lulu that seems to exist within the comic-book community — particularly among those female comics professionals you desire to rally to your standard — seems to be: "What is the purpose of the Friends of Lulu?" What is it that you are trying to accomplish? Yes, of course — we have the platitudes outlined above, but this provides more suspicion than reassurance. By the act of creating and publishing a comic book with interesting female characters, a Terry Moore or a David Lapham or a Colleen Doran accomplish the task that you set for yourselves. A store owner like Brian Hibbs or Steve Solomos or Mimi Cruz, sharing the avowed goal within its larger context — improved quality in the comic books that they promote and display and push, better comic books for everyone, women *included* — does more to serve the dynamic, in the view of many who might be sympathetic to your cause, than does the rendering of Womankind as a special-interest group with needs separate from those of the comics-reading community or the general population we endeavour to court. Such advocacy swerves dangerously close to the territory of the Thought Police, for if the Friends of Lulu is going to aspire to be more than a social organisation for comic-book people of specific genitalia to break bread and trade gossip with others possessing the same configuration of genitalia, many in the comic-book community would like some assurance that its aspirations in political areas are in tune with individual freedoms and don't stand in opposition to such freedoms. The fact that the current president is inextricably linked with the San Diego Comic Book Convention and that the San Diego Comic Book Convention has proved itself time and again a flaccid, vacillating, and at best halfhearted ally of creative freedom is enough to give sober men and women pause. And it does raise what is to me — and (I would hope) many comics professionals — the question of which takes precedence in your collective world: creative freedom or ideological purity.

Let me hasten to say that I don't raise these issues out of malice or in any capricious fashion. The argument which I am developing had its genesis with the Oklahoma prosecution of Planet Comics for possessing *Verotika* #4 for the purposes of selling it (along with other works). As the story unfolded and we were all made aware that the two store owners were facing a combined prison sentence of eighty years in jail, I found myself pondering what the Friends of Lulu thought of all this. I was not unmindful of the fact that feminism, since its latest incarnation got off to a roaring start around 1970, has been allowed to adopt an ostrich-like posture as regards Freedom of the Press versus the Feminist Agenda. This is odd since the two have been, are, and (I'm sure) will continue to be in diametric opposition to one another. I have no doubt that it was the extreme nature of the penalty the two retailers were facing that deflected my imagination along strange roads indeed. Something which is so extreme as to beggar the imagination on one side is prone to expand the imagination on another. I was moved to wonder: did there exist a Friend of Lulu who thought that eighty years in jail was a suitable punishment for possessing a comic book that was (indisputably) degrad-

ing to women? Making another leap, I pondered still further: did there exist a Friend of Lulu who considered a total prison sentence of eighty years inadequate? If such a Friend existed, what penalty would satisfy her?

How many Friends of Lulu shared my horror at the punishment bearing down upon these two retailers? How many saw this punishment as excessive — and *how* excessive was it, in their view? For possessing and selling images degrading to women, should an individual lose his freedom for a decade? Two decades? A year? Six months? Should that individual have his house and car and family taken away from him? This is not idle curiosity on my part. For a group of female comics professionals to align with one another, to form a group whose advocacy *by its nature* is gender-based, to me demands an answer to these questions. If I were to form with Gary Groth a Friends of Clark Kent, making such an organisation exclusively composed of white male comics professionals, many questions would be asked along exactly these lines. What is *implied* by the exclusion? What is the agenda, the purpose (hidden, ostensible, or actual) which *requires* the exclusion? Is it outside the realm of possibility that many members of the Friends of Lulu would be in the forefront of accusation and indictment? No. No, I don't believe it is.

Living in a glass house of extreme and marginalised viewpoint as I do (the aforementioned issue 186), I'm hardly in a position to hurl projectiles at those in a similar circumstance. Let us suppose (for the sake of argument) that there exists a faction, a cabal, or a member within the Friends of Lulu who believes wholeheartedly that the only punishment suitable for those responsible for *Verotika* #4 is the death penalty. Let us further assume that this hypothetical congress or individual believes that this punishment should be extended to anyone who ordered a single copy for sale in his or her store, extended even to those who purchased a copy in a store. Would it surprise you to discover that I would defend to the death that group or individual's right to hold and express that opinion? Not that such a punishment should be carried out outside of the boundaries of the law — no, at vigilantism I break ranks with all viewpoints — but that efforts should be made to *change* the law so that possession of *Verotika* #4 should be made a capital offense.

I near the crux of my argument.

Given that the Friends of Lulu is the only organisation of women comics professionals — and by such exclusivity is rendered (whether you like it or not) a primary political instrument within the comic-book community; given that the brush fires of censorship and oppression seem to increase in number with each passing day in our community; and given that explicit sexuality in arts and entertainment represents a kind of unholy common ground for feminists and the radical religious right . . .

But let's pause on that last point a moment for it consists of the largest and most persuasive element "weighing in" on the side of creative freedom and (to the reasoning individual) rendering the largest debit in the account of feminist ideology. Shorn of organisational rhetoric, alarmist incoherencies, and idiosyncratic platitudes, the underpinnings of the "family values" argument and the "I am woman, hear me roar" argument are indistinguishable from one another, consisting as they do of "we know best." The religious right and rhetorical feminism both begin with the supposition that — existing as they do on a self-perceived high, nay, *highest* moral ground — they are the best suited to decide what the rest of us should be allowed and shouldn't be allowed to see and/or read. Comparable in its nature to any other ideological "marriage of convenience," it is going to favour the religious right in the long run. Why? Because the feminist agenda stops short of the religious right's agenda and consequently the latter philosophy encompasses the former. Because feminism traditionally weighs in on the side of censorship — being very much in favour of the suppression and elimination of images and words which are "degrading to women" (thus the *highest* moral ground — feminists don't just speak for themselves, they speak for all Womankind) — feminists become inadvertent partners of the religious right, who seek that same suppression and elimination because the images and words are "immoral and unchristian." The danger for feminism in ignoring both the truth and the net effect of this is in the implied threat to feminist tribal totems like lesbianism, bisexuality, contraception, abortion, homosexuality — all of which are perceived as "immoral and unchristian."

Moving from the larger societal context back down to the microcosmic world of funny books, it is not difficult to envision the Friends of Lulu contemplating the Planet Comics bust and deciding to "sit this one out." Unbecoming a piece of imagery as it might be, it is not much more difficult to picture a certain glee on the part of some or all of the Friends at what has come to pass — lock 'em up and throw away the key, make an example of 'em, etc., etc. Of course, this overlooks the "strange bedfellows" of the political situation. If the Friends of Lulu decides to "sit this one out" on grounds of ideology, where does it propose to find allies when it comes time to defend Roberta Gregory's *Naughty Bits* and *Artistic Licentiousness* or Donna Barr's *Desert Peach*? I think it safe to say that whatever success the religious right has in prosecuting *Verotika* or Eros Comics will only embolden its efforts when it comes to *Stuck Rubber Baby* or the more explicit of Roberta's and Donna's works. "Liberal" is certainly as damning an appellation as can be contemplated in the waning hours of the twentieth century, but that is the foundation I'm advocating here. If the comic-book field fragments into special-interest groups, factions, and cliques (i.e., Verotik publisher Glenn Danzig offering support for Planet Comics but not the Comic Book Legal Defense Fund; feminists supporting explicit portrayals of lesbian acts but not heterosexual ones), we become the archetypal "house divided against itself." We will not stand for long. Our collective resources are limited as it is — severely limited. To go off in a dozen different directions at once — picking and choosing what organisations we support or don't support as individuals, based on the degree to which

the organisation reflects our individual preferences and prejudices — strikes me as foolhardy in the extreme. The contemplation of most male homosexual acts makes my gorge rise (an assertion for which I have been roundly lambasted in personal correspondence with Howard Cruse). To say the least, such acts fall outside of the realm of my personal preference and prejudice. But if you were to ask if I thought the CBLDF should come to the defense of anyone being prosecuted for *portraying* those acts in a comic book or anyone displaying such a comic book or anyone selling such a comic book, the answer would be: "Of course." There would be no question in my mind whatever. Liberal thinking — to me, common sense. The overarching concern is the freedom of personal expression. The CBLDF defends First Amendment rights in the comic-book field where those rights are challenged at a local or state level. The CBLDF doesn't defend the right to draw comic books that a majority of women would perceive as being degrading to their gender, any more than the CBLDF defends the right to portray lesbianism or gay sexuality as being preferable to heterosexuality. It is a much larger umbrella which overarches all viewpoints: the right to hold those viewpoints, the right to advocate those viewpoints, the right to draw, publish, distribute, display, sell, and buy those viewpoints. The threat to *any* First Amendment freedoms is a threat to *all* First Amendment freedoms.

This concludes my argument, setting the stage for my petition to the Friends of Lulu:

While it is uncertain if such a document would do any good in the case of a bust like the one suffered by Kennedy and Hunter of Planet Comics, I am moved to wonder — if only by the excessive zeal demonstrated by the Oklahoma City prosecutors — if some manner of petition or supporting document generated by the Friends of Lulu might not weigh in favour of the First Amendment in this case. Clearly, here is an organisation which might be thought to be in diametric opposition to Frank Thorne, Eros Comics, *Verotika*, Glenn Danzig, et al. In composing such a document (in press release form, as an *amicus* brief, or simply as a declaration of ethics), all qualification could be vented upon the page and turned to the advantage of the First Amendment:

"We the undersigned, while sickened and repelled by the insensitive, dehumanizing, and malignant treatment of women in the comic books contained in the indictment and believing wholeheartedly that such works represent warped and subhuman values on the part of their creators, publishers, distributors, retailers, and consumers, still hold to an unshakable belief that all words and images produced, published, distributed, sold, and purchased by citizens of the United States of America are protected by the First Amendment to the Constitution and that the First Amendment supersedes any and all individual preferences in the form or substance of creative works . . ." etc.

You can even add as many adjectives to "warped and subhuman" as you care to, to alleviate the bad taste that defending such individuals is going to leave in your mouth (as it leaves in the mouth of any person with an ounce of humanity — in which group I include myself, as regards *Verotika* #4).

Taking such a stand, I think, would go a long way towards establishing the Friends of Lulu as an active and positive force in the field. It might very well attract more members to your cause. It would certainly set you apart from the sordid history of Andrea Dworkin-style feminism which sought to replace the First Amendment with the predisposition and prejudices of a handful of ideologues. Such a petition outlined above, signed by every female comics professional who believes in the preeminence of the First Amendment and circulated to weekly newspapers, daily newspapers, gay newspapers, and radio and television stations in a jurisdiction where a comics retailer has been arrested or is being prosecuted for offering material for sale to adults in his or her store, I think might just have an impact of some kind far out of proportion to the time and energy it might take to assemble and circulate such a document. I also wouldn't imagine that the time and energy and resourcefulness of researching the media environment of a city where a bust has taken place would unduly tax the resources of the Friends of Lulu — and that the "man bites dog" quality of feminists defending explicit sexuality on the basis of the First Amendment might be sufficient to ensure media coverage of some description.

Of course, that presupposes that the Friends of Lulu — as individuals or as an organisation — *believes* in the preeminence of the First Amendment over individual predisposition and prejudice. It presupposes that you might be interested in assisting those whose First Amendment rights are under attack. It presupposes that — even if no consensus on such a proposal could be reached — the executive of the Friends of Lulu would be inclined to authorize and encourage those members who *did* see merit in this proposal to assemble such a document for this purpose and for the executive of the Friends of Lulu to make its membership list available to an interested coordinator for just such a purpose.

I'm curious, anyway. *Very* curious.

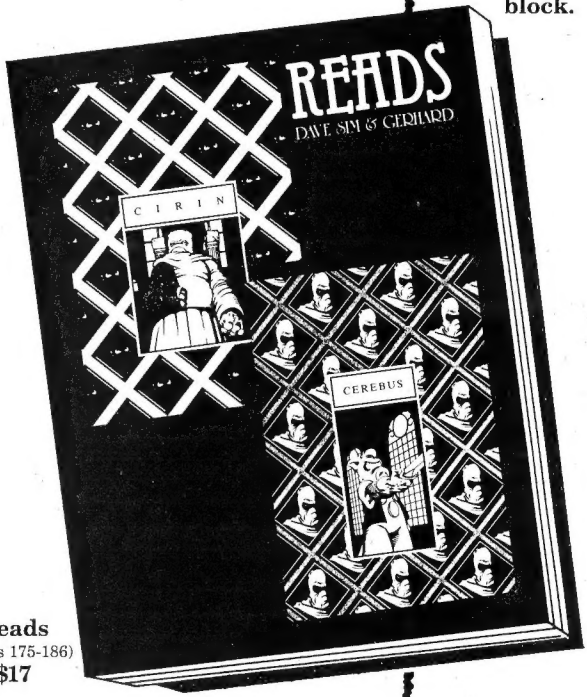
But then I have always found the dichotomy between "freedom of choice" and imposed limitations on the range of choices a self-evident chink in the armour of feminist argument. I can't say that I expect any action to be taken along the lines of this letter. But, then, the purpose of these open letters in *Cerebus* has usually been to read my views into the record at critical junctures in the ongoing history of the direct market. For my own peace of mind more than anything else.

If the Friends of Lulu executive or any member of the Friends of Lulu is interested in outlining its or her views on the above proposal, I'll be happy to print such views in their entirety.

Sincerely,

Dave Sim

There's a new kid on the block.



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This one sort of took me by surprise -- it started with a letter from Joe Chiapetta reserving a table for the Montreal Spirits Stop. Joe is the creator of SILLY DADDY which I've plugged before when I got in the first graphic novel collection. I remember wandering by his table about fifteen minutes before the Kitchener Stop was scheduled to open, anxiety running high in the room (would ANY paying customers show up?). A page or two into the latest SILLY DADDY comic book and I completely lost track of where I was. The Kitchener Stop went very well for just about everyone (photo on the back cover was shot in the Walper Pub) and the latest SILLY DADDY was even better. Okay, another plug -- send ten bucks to Joe Chiapetta, 2209 Northgate, N. Riverside, Il 60546.

CONFIRMED: THE POPE

Well, I thought to myself, self, I thought, Joe is really jumping the gun on this one. That was when someone phoned asking for details about the Montreal Spirits Stop. I asked his name.

'Jay Stephens.'

Long pause on my end.

'THE Jay Stephens?'

It was indeed. Of course there was a long pause on HIS end after I asked. Comic book creators aren't used to being THE anyone. Jay does a wonderful comic book published by Black Eye Productions (338 Kribs Street, Cambridge, Ontario, Canada N3C 3J3/tel. (519) 658-2407/fax (519) 648-2407/ e-mail: mvrana @ e-world.com) called ATOMIC CITY TALES. Well worth checking out (as are all the Black Eye books).

At THAT point I realised that the Montreal stop was just around the corner insofar as this was the second last issue to ship before the event. YIKES. So, I'm typing this Sunday January 7 for inclusion in the issue shipping off to Preney tomorrow (203? Yeah, 203).

It's going to be held at the HOTEL MARITIME, 1155 Guy Street, Montreal, Quebec, H3H 2K5. Telephone:(514) 932-1411, Fax:(514) 932-0446. The room rates should be pretty reasonable from what Keith Logan tells me.

CONFIRMED: STRANGE ATTRACTORS/ MICHAEL COHEN

I'm anticipating a pretty good turn out from Quebec, the Maritimes, Ontario and the border states of New England (you know -- New Hampshire, Vermont, Maine and Rick Veitch's unconscious mind). Now that Joe Chiapetta and THE Jay Stephens have been accomodated, there are still 38 tables (no, wait -- Ger and I are going to need two and Claude from Librairie Nebula -- the retailer du jour -- gets three, so...)there are still 33 tables up for grabs. Send check or money order for $20 Canadian or $15 U.S. to AARDVARK VANAHEIM, Box 1674 Stn. C, Kitchener, Ontario, CANADA, N2G 4R2 to reserve a table. First come, first served.

JOE (smile when you say that) CHIAPETTA

THE Jay Stephens

GOGO GUY
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